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ABSTRACT

In the fall of 1965, San Bernardino Valley College conducted a modified "college within a college" experiment with six faculty and 34 students participating. It was hypothesized that a smaller unit, with access to the facilities of a larger unit, would have a basis for establishing an interdependence and sense of community. This pilot program had three objectives: (1) establishment of an interdisciplinary program; (2) intensification of student-to-student relationships and establishment of a climate for more open and frequent contacts between students and faculty; and (3) the discovery of whether students in such programs continue their education and learn more than students who do not have such privileged and integrated instruction. Follow-up statistics showed that an educational experience that fosters a sense of community contributes to the lowering of drop-out rates. A description of program organization is offered, as are critical comments and suggestions for improvement. (CA)

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"A College Within a Community College Experiment"

by Roger Schmidt

The plan of a college within a college is to create a small self contained visit or units within the larger total college. The smaller unit has access to the facilities of the larger unit (library, recreation, etc.), but at the same time possesses a basis for establishing an interdependence and sense of community which is functionally impossible for the total college.

In the fall of 1965, San Bernardino Valley College conducted a modified college within a college experiment. The program grew out of a faculty and administration concern with student alienation and protest. Student protest had surfaced dramatically in the autumn of 1964 when the Free Speech Movement erupted at Berkeley. While the issues at Berkeley were free speech and advocacy and what the university's role in disciplining or penalizing civilly disobedient students ("double jeopardy") should be, there was also a critique of the highly bureaucratized and, from the students perspective, impersonalized "multiversity." Students sloganized their sense of alienation from an educational process which, in their view, placed a higher value on personality with the words, "Do not fold or mutilate!"

JC 710 104

The San Bernardino Valley College program was thus in part a response to that aspect of student protest which emphasized the inaccessibility of professors and the impersonalization of the educational experience. At the same time, the community college faced problems that differed significantly in magnitude and content from those at Berkeley. In the past, the organization and program of the community college had been able to maintain a relatively personalized education through the availability of a number of small classes, a healthy faculty-student ratio, and a commitment of its faculty resources to teaching rather than to research. This happy condition was, however, changing because of a steadily increasing student population

and a corresponding rise in the costs of education. The result was the creation of large lecture courses, fewer opportunities for faculty and student dialogue and thus a more impersonalized educational environment.

Within the context of student dissatisfaction and cries for "relevance" there has been some, though surprisingly little, curricular response if ethnic studies is discounted. This is partly the case because student unrest has subsequently been linked to demands for "participatory democracy" in the governance of colleges and to the relationship of colleges and college students to the grave issues confronting the nation: war, racism, survival. The broader scenario has obscured the need to experiment with the curriculum and the educational process.

With both national and local conditions in mind, a group of concerned San Bernardino Valley College faculty, under the leadership of philosophy professor, Dr. Gordon Atkins, and with the support of then Vice-President for Instruction, J.W. McDaniel, developed a program designed to establish a "community of learners." The planning group knew of one experimental model of a "college within a college." Such an experiment was in process under the direction of Dr. Joseph Tussman at the University of California at Berkeley. The Tussman program assumed that student demands for relevance were valid and should be met by studies in subjects and topics which go to the heart of the human condition. The experiment established a curriculum around paradigmatic historical epochs beginning with the Greeks. Students and professors sought to illuminate the present through the study of man's enduring themes--freedom and order, the rational and irrational, war and peace. The program involved a faculty committed to the relevance of materials outside of their disciplines, a curriculum which stressed classical sources and Ecclesiastes' dictum, "There is nothing new under the sun," and finally a group of students who would share this core curriculum for their first two years of college before leaving the intimacy of the program to specialize in upper division work.

In this context, plans were formulated in the spring of 1965 for a one semester pilot study program in the liberal arts. Six faculty members and 34 students participated. It was this group that was the microcosm within the larger college community. The students were selected on the basis of their preference for a general liberal arts curriculum and their interest in such an experimental experience. Care was taken to make the program open to students who were not qualified by test scores for freshman English. Nine of the 34 were not qualified for the transfer English course which the program entailed. Surprisingly, all nine received passing marks in English while three of their more qualified students did not. All 34 students were enrolled in the same course of study with the exception of physical education. Their schedule included Human Biology, Freshman English, Humanities, Philosophy and American Government.

The pilot program had essentially three objectives. The faculty was to make a special effort in the preparation of course materials to synthesize and relate the separate disciplines into an integrated educational experience - in short, to establish an interdisciplinary program.

Secondly, it was hoped that through block scheduling, with each student having an identical program, the characteristics of a primary group would be achieved. The second objective included not only an intensifying of student to student relationships but, through the vehicle of a cooperating faculty team, the establishing of a climate for more open and frequent contacts between students and faculty.

A third consideration was to determine the relationship of the integrated student program to academic achievement, that is, to discover if students in such a program continue their education and learn more than students who do not have such privileged and integrated instruction.

The attempt to bring together six professors representing different disciplines was not an unqualified success. The intention was to overcome the fragmentation that

so characterizes the educational experience. The block curriculum, biology, philosophy, English, Humanities, American Government was scheduled in a conventional manner. Two of the courses (Government and biology) utilized the college's televised lecture series. A third class (Humanities) was part of the college's large Humanities 1A course which entails a lecture session of 600 students. In these three classes, the Pilot Group found themselves within a larger student unit. The plan here was to create intimate small units within the framework of already existing large lecture classes. The Pilot Group of 34 students also participated in self-contained laboratory and discussion groups in connection with the large lecture part of the three courses. Philosophy and English were taught in the conventional, one instructor, 3 hours a week fashion. Instructors were left to their own devices for planning inter-class meetings, integrated assignments, etc. The result of this structure was the fairly effective negation of meaningful interdisciplinary efforts. The large lecture courses possessed a format independent of the operation of the Pilot Group. This fact precluded the establishing of themes which might have tied together the five somewhat disparate courses. Secondly, the inability of the professors to regularly meet for the time consuming planning that interdiscipline teaching requires seriously hampered the experiment. In addition, there was not enough flexibility in the scheduling to allow interesting experiments in holding classes together. Despite these criticisms, there did exist considerably more interaction of professors across the sometimes artificial lives of disciplines as well as a greater degree of synthesizing of knowledge than occurs in the typical college program. The overcoming of the fragmentation of knowledge is a very attractive goal and continues to be something worth serious exploration by professors who are able to devote their time and energies to it. The lack of faculty participation and support is the most persistent obstacle to effective interdiscipline programs.

In respect to establishing some of the elan of primary groups, it was clearly

evident that this goal was achieved. The students developed a sense of group identity which fostered more intimate interpersonal relationships. The students individually and as a group tended to be more open, questioning and at ease with their peers and instructors. In this respect the six faculty members were able to develop a richer human relationship with their students than often occurs in the more orthodox programs. Teachers and students shared in several activities outside the classroom including breakfast, a picnic, a beach trip and a biology field trip capped by an Italian dinner at a restaurant in LaJolla, California.

Students in the program were surveyed twice, once at the end of the semester program and again four years later. Student response was primarily laudatory. They agreed that they had shared an intimacy with their fellow students. Comments like: "It has made college more personal," "It is easier to ask questions of the teacher," "You work harder when you know that somebody is interested" or "Student-teacher relationships are more intimate and creative" typified the surveys. At least one student did not take to what his classmate termed "wonderful experiences with the group" for he wrote, "The Pilot Section did not work for me. The idea of a family repulses me." The second inventory which was taken in the spring of 1970 was even more laudatory of the program. With the passage of time, the former "Pilot groupers" stressed the projects value in creating an essentially supportive environment for the beginning of their college studies. In this regard, one former student observed that the feeling of belonging generated by the program combatted the alienation and sense of being lost which is commonplace for so many freshmen. As one student put it: "Actually, I think the project had many more successes (achievements) than it did failures. I, for one, was able to get a much better grip on the whole concept of 'college' and 'education' thanks to this project. Both my social and academic adjustments were much easier. When there is an easier general adjustment

to 'college,' the student is able to perform in a much more satisfactory manner (grade-wise, etc.) and this is the greatest success of this program. I'm not saying that it caused any of us in the program to go on any further than we had originally intended with our education, but it certainly gave us a better start."

There were critical comments and suggestions for improvement. The students were aware that the program lacked cohesiveness between the subjects and that the total program was "not as well planned as we had hoped for." While they were disappointed in the breakdown of the interdisciplinary aspect they overwhelmingly encouraged the college to continue and expand the program.

It is difficult to evaluate the project's third goal, academic achievement. Essential to determining how the achievement level of the pilot group of students was effected by their special situation would have required the setting up of a control group.

Although the experiment lacked a control group, two statistical studies were made. The studies were based on an analysis of the group's performance on the college's entrance examinations (SCAT), a writing skills test given by the English department to freshman transfer students and the Allport-Vernon-Lindsey test of values. The researcher, Dr. Aram Sogomonian, concluded that the group did not significantly differ from the norms established for the national student universe. Despite their random selection, they were, in his judgment, representative of the SBVC population of transfer students; thus the studies, while not measuring achievement, at least indicated that the selection process had not guaranteed the success of the program by selecting only the academically exceptional student.

Subsequently, a follow-up study of the group was made. The study involved an assessment of the group's continuation of study rate and graduation figures. The following statistics generally support the argument that an educational experience that fosters "a sense of community" contributes to the lowering of dropout rates.

Total students in the Program		34
Number of students completing the one semester program		31 of 34
	Retention Rate	91.1
	Drop Rate	8.9
Number of students completing all 5 courses in the program with a passing mark.		29 of 31
(One student completed 4 courses and the other student completed 3 courses)		
Number of students from the program returning for the spring semester conventional program.		31 of 31
Number of students who completed the second semester at SBVC		26 of 31
Number of students graduating from SBVC		4 of 34
	% of graduates	11.7
Number of students transferring from SBVC		17 of 34
	Transfer rate	50%
Number of students graduating from a 4-year college thus far.		8 of 34
(8 of 17 transfers have graduated from 4-year colleges. Of the eight, three earned their A.A. degrees).		
	% of total with B.A.'s.	23.5
Students in the program eligible for Freshman English (English 1A)		25 of 34
# of qualified students who passed English 1A		21 of 25 or 84%
Students not eligible for Freshman English (English 1A)		9 of 34
# of non-eligible students who passed English 1A		9 of 9 or 100%

In conclusion, it would appear that experiments that provide different ways for bringing students and teachers together in order to establish a more supportive and interactive educational process should be continued. This is, of course, not to imply that all students should have or need a college within a college program. There continues to be a need for institutional flexibility and the fostering of innovative and relevant programs. Relevance does not apparently mean simply being "now" minded as students found both the Tussman plan with its emphasis on the classics and the Valley College experiment with its stress on a general liberal arts education relevant. Relevance means being part of an educational process which relates itself to persons. It is essentially a humanizing process. It is a striving for that precious and momentary experience that the poet, W.H. Auden describes when, "Everything became a You and nothing was an It."

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